



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 5 WISEWOMAN Partners With Chilkat Indian Village, Incorporates Cultural Traditions To Promote Fitness

Alaska Native Women Are More Active as a Result

Location Rural southeastern Alaska

Focus Remove the barriers that block underserved women from being physically active.

Strategy WISEWOMAN staff with the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium developed partnerships that give underserved women access to a fitness center where they can be physically active.

Levels of Success Many community benefits have resulted. Collaborating with partners stretched the WISEWOMAN program's resources and allowed more women to use the fitness center. Activities that build on cultural traditions and messages that link lifestyle changes with lower blood pressure and cholesterol contribute to healthier communities.

Interpersonal changes also have occurred. Reducing the cost of passes to the fitness center encouraged women to be more physically active and use the fitness center. As they participated in Ravens Versus Eagles activities and recorded the time they were active, daily and over time, the women became more aware of how lifestyle changes could lower their blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Results So far, 10 women have received and used their fitness center passes, and 15 women have participated in the Ravens Versus Eagles competition.

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Klukwan is an ancient Tlingit village of about 100 residents located on the banks of the Chilkat River. With about 60 inches of snow, rain, or sleet falling each year, Klukwan has only 3 months of mild weather each year. The village has no sidewalks, but there is an eagle-watching path just south of the village where some residents walk on mild weather days. However, concerns about dogs and bears keep some residents from walking outside. The lack of sidewalks, harsh weather, and threat of dogs and bears were preventing many people from being physically active outdoors. Klukwan Fitness Center staff worked with the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium's WISEWOMAN project (SEARHC) to address this problem.

It all started when the fitness center offered a spacious room where SEARHC Health Educator Ellen Carey-Starr could hold lifestyle classes. Ellen also saw a chance to encourage women to become physically active by offering them access to the center's fitness equipment and classes. She met with members of the Chilkat Indian Village in Klukwan, Alaska. They liked her ideas and formed a partnership to allow women participating in SEARHC's WISEWOMAN project to use Klukwan Fitness Center for half price. The Chilkat Indian Village printed passes allowing the women to use the center for half price. SEARHC bought the passes and sold them to women in the WISEWOMAN project so they could begin using the fitness center.

The SEARHC staff and the Chilkat Indian Village Tribal Services staff also collaborated to create Ravens Versus Eagles, an annual fitness competition that builds on cultural traditions and encourages women to be physically active. The competition's name has special meaning for women in Klukwan, because every member of the Tlingit Tribe is linked to either the Raven or Eagle moiety. SEARHC staff members use posters and monthly calendars to promote the 3-month event. Women participating in the competition receive a monthly calendar to record the

amount of time they spend being active each day. Women get 1 point for every 30 minutes they are physically active.

At the end of the 3-month competition, SEARHC staff host a dinner celebration to honor the women who complete and turn in their calendars. Each woman receives a wrapped gift such as a sandwich cooler bag or water bottle. Many women attending the dinner say the competition has had a positive effect on their health. Some women say they feel better, whereas others talk about losing inches around their waist. One woman lowered her cholesterol level by 30 points. Other women have been motivated by these successes.



Working out at the Klukwan Fitness Center

Importance of Success

Sponsoring reduced-cost passes to the fitness center has allowed more women to have access to facilities that promote physical activity. The Chilkat Indian Village partnership has helped SEARHC's WISEWOMAN enrollees afford the fitness center, improved use of the facility, and encouraged women to walk more during the Ravens Versus Eagles competition. Such partnerships are cost-beneficial because they can increase use of community

fitness facilities and provide participants with low-cost access to these facilities.

Lessons Learned

- Consider offering reduced-cost passes to a fitness center as a way to promote physical activity for low-income participants and get more women to use the fitness center.
- Look for partners who can help you stretch your existing resources.
- Consider creative ways to develop activities that build on cultural traditions and that link lifestyle changes to lower blood pressure and cholesterol. Ravens Versus Eagles activities encourage women to record the time they are active, both daily and over time. Such activities help women become more aware of how lifestyle changes lower their blood pressure and cholesterol levels.